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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABIDJAN 000128

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [IV](#)
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: PEACE EFFORTS CONTINUE BUT REAL
PROGRESS UNCERTAIN

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Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) Summary. Peace efforts here continue but it is far from clear whether they will bear fruit. Burkina Faso President Compaore, as new Chairman of ECOWAS, has moved quickly to take on a central mediating role in the upcoming direct dialogue between President Gbagbo and rebel New Forces (FN) leader Soro. According to the French ambassador, Gbagbo might be considering inviting Soro and the other two main opposition leaders to be co-vice presidents. Pro-Gbagbo youth militia leader Ble Goude has launched a "peace caravan" to promote reconciliation around the country including the North, but FN contacts tell us they consider this a joke and they will not let the peace caravan into their areas. Identification, which is sure to be at the top of the agenda in the direct dialogue, is proceeding but very slowly. President Gbagbo, the FN, and court clerks are all in different ways currently blocking it from going forward more quickly. We see more promise in Compaore,s more pro-active ECOWAS mediation than in the direct dialogue per se. This is exactly the kind of re-energized African effort that we believe is essential to move the peace process forward, and which we believe the United States should strongly support (reftel). The recent naming of Ghanaian President Kufuor could also foreshadow more pro-active AU involvement. Still, stronger outside African pressure may well not be enough. The basic underlying problems today are exactly the same difficult and complex ones that precipitated this crisis in the first place and that have so far defied every effort to resolve them. Even if the direct dialogue does produce yet another peace agreement, it will take time, patience and determination on the part of the AU and ECOWAS to press the Ivoirians to implement it. The graveyard of unimplemented Ivoirian peace agreements has many headstones. End Summary.

12. (C) International and Ivoirian efforts to advance this country's peace process are continuing, but it is not certain whether they will bear fruit any time soon.

13. (C) Burkina Faso President Compaore, the new Chairman of ECOWAS, has moved quickly to play a much more pro-active role than his predecessors in Cote d'Ivoire,s peace process. Earlier this week Compaore sent Security Minister (and reportedly third-ranking member of Burkina Faso,s government) Djibril Bassole to the rebel capital of Bouake to participate in a meeting between FN leader Guillaume Soro and President Gbagbo,s Press Spokesman and shadow justice minister Desire Tagro. FN Deputy Press Spokesman Alain Lobognon told us that the talks were cordial (except for Tagro,s refusal to accept an FN military honor guard) but non-substantive. Next, on February 5, Compaore himself will chair a meeting in Ouagadougou directly between Gbagbo and Soro. According to local press reports, in the days after this meeting Compaore plans to meet in Ouagadougou with the two main political opposition leaders, former President Bedie

and former Prime Minister Ouattara, and then, some time before February 15, he will announce the results of this dialogue, presumably mainly to identify the key areas of disagreement rather than to propose his own solutions.

14. (C) The French Ambassador told the Ambassador February 1 that the French believe the Presidential camp is considering proposing to bring Soro, Ouattara and Bedie into the presidency as three vice presidents, two vice presidents and a prime minister, or some other arrangement. (The idea to appoint all three as vice presidents was proposed last September by Gabonese President Bongo. It met with guarded interest from the three opposition leaders but was scorned at that time by Gbagbo.)

15. (C) Meanwhile, Charles Ble Goude, leader of the pro-Gbagbo Young Patriots militia, announced on January 20 that he would lead a "peace caravan" around the country to promote reconciliation, including to the North to "embrace his northern brothers." Ble Goude, once a fiery, combative Gbagbo partisan not hesitant to resort to violence, for some months now has been trying to recast himself as a man of peace and reconciliation. Last fall, for example, he and most of the pro-opposition youth groups announced a truce after violent street confrontations over the identification public hearings had led to several deaths. The opposition youth groups appeared to be getting the upper hand in at least some of these street clashes. So far all of the peace caravan's stops have been in government-controlled areas. FN Deputy Press Spokesman Alain Lobognon told us February 2 that the FN consider the peace caravan a joke and have no intention of allowing it to enter areas of the country they control.

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16. (C) One issue that is certain to be at the top of the agenda in the direct dialogue is identification. This process is still progressing, but very slowly because there is no political agreement on the revised procedures which Prime Minister Banny is trying painstakingly to implement. The mobile courts -- audiences foraines, which President Gbagbo insists can only issue birth certificates, did resume operations on January 19, but only in the Abidjan area. Sources in the office of the UN High Representative for Elections tell us that the number of people who have appeared before these re-launched audiences foraines is still in the low hundredQ but they expect that to increase next week as more of them are re-launched.

17. (C) Gbagbo adamantly insisted that the nationality certificate -- the key document through which an Ivoirian citizen establishes eligibility to receive an identity card and to vote -- must be issued by a different court called a tribunal. There are only 33 such tribunals in the country and they are not mobile, making it, according to the opposition, prohibitively difficult for people to obtain the certificates. Banny therefore proposed that the number of tribunals be increased by 175 and that they be made mobile. Gbagbo agreed to increase the number, and created the new courts. However, he refused to allow them to be mobile. Therefore, Banny proposed a compromise under which court clerks, who are already accompanying the judges to the audiences foraines, would go to the people to collect their paperwork and subsequently deliver their nationality certificates. That is, there would be three ways to apply for a nationality certificate. One would be, as now, to go to the tribunal and apply. The second would be to submit the paperwork to the court clerk at the audience foraine, who would bring it back to the tribunal for the judge to issue the certificate. The third would be for court clerks also to travel on their own around the countryside specifically to collect applications for nationality certificates and later to deliver them.

18. (C) There are three obstacles preventing Banny,s

compromise from being implemented. One is that, although Gbagbo agreed to create more tribunals, he has so far refused to sign a decree appointing more judges to preside over them.

The second obstacle is that the court clerks are threatening to block the entire identification process, over some of the proposed new procedures and over unrelated labor grievances. What they say they don't like about the proposed new procedures is the idea of traveling alone in the countryside, because they say they would fear for their safety in the rebel-controlled areas. They are also trying to use the leverage from the key role that is envisioned for them in the identification process to gain higher pay and enhanced job status. They issued an ultimatum to Prime Minister Banny that they would bring the entire identification process to a halt if their demands were not met by January 31. It is still not clear whether they have done so.

¶9. (C) The third obstacle to implementing the new procedures is that the FN still refuse to accept them, and continue to insist that the audiences foraines must be empowered to issue both birth and nationality certificates on the spot, as was the case until Gbagbo stepped in to stop them. FN leader Soro indicated at the January 12 International Working Group meeting that he would be willing to consider some mechanism involving separate courts, but it would be up to Gbagbo to propose something that guarantees every citizen not only the right but the ability to obtain a nationality certificate. This is certain to be Soro's bottom line in the upcoming direct dialogue.

¶10. (C) Comment. We see more promise in Compaore's more pro-active ECOWAS mediation than in the direct dialogue per se. This is exactly the kind of re-energized African effort that we believe is essential to move the peace process forward, and which we believe the United States should strongly support. The recent naming of Ghana President Kufuor as AU Chairman could also foreshadow more pro-active AU involvement -- Kufuor hosted three high profile Ivoirian peace conferences in 2003 and 2004. Still, stronger outside African pressure may well not be enough. The basic underlying problems today are exactly the same difficult and complex ones that precipitated this crisis in the first place and that have so far defied every effort to resolve them. Up to now, every time international mediation has produced a burst of good will among the Ivoirian parties, they have only been able to reach the point of signing an agreement, never of fully implementing one. Kufuor's Accra I, II and III mark only three of the many headstones in the graveyard of Ivoirian peace agreements. Thus, even if the direct dialogue does produce yet another agreement, it will take time, patience and determination on the part of the AU and ECOWAS

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to press the Ivoirians to implement it. End Comment.

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